

# BAT unit accused of boosting nicotine in tobacco

By Jeremy Kahn in Washington  
and Tony Jackson in London

The US subsidiary of Britain's BAT Industries is using a genetically engineered form of tobacco with high nicotine content in some of its cigarettes.

Brown & Williamson Tobacco publicly admitted the use of the high-nicotine tobacco yesterday after Mr David Kessler, head of the US Food and Drug Administration, accused it in Washington of secretly developing the strain.

Mr Kessler told a House of Representatives sub-committee that officials at B&W had instructed contract researchers who helped create the genetically altered tobacco plant, code-named Y-1, to mislead his agency about its existence.

He said Y-1, which is grown in Brazil, contained more than twice the nicotine found in normal tobacco plants. Nicotine, a toxic substance, is a stimulant in small doses and is also addictive.

Mr Kessler's accusation is the latest in a series of potentially damaging charges against the tobacco industry. The House sub-committee is seeking to determine whether the FDA can legally regulate tobacco as a drug. The FDA chief also said some chemicals on a list of tobacco additives released by six cigarette manufacturers in April were used to increase nicotine

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Philip Morris wants to change,  
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## BAT unit used high-nicotine tobacco

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levels. Tobacco companies, for example, routinely added ammonia to cigarettes as an "impact booster", doubling the amount of nicotine a smoker inhales.

Mr Kessler said: "The findings lay to rest any notion that there is no manipulation and control of nicotine undertaken in the tobacco industry."

B&W officials admitted privately to the FDA last week that

this high-nicotine tobacco had been used in its Raleigh, Richmond and Viceroy brands, according to Mr Kessler. Those were "distributed nationally in 1993".

B&W said last night that Y-1 had been originally developed by the US Department of Agriculture in the late 1970s, in an attempt to find a tobacco that would yield less tar for a given amount of nicotine. The company had taken up the work and applied unsuccessfully for a

patent for Y-1 in 1991. It said the brands in which Y-1 was used represented less than 0.5 per cent of the total US market last year. Mr Martin Broughton, BAT's chief executive, said last night that cigarettes containing Y-1 had proved unpopular and had been largely withdrawn.

Mr Kessler said yesterday that "several million pounds" of Y-1 tobacco was currently stored in warehouses in the US and could be used at any time.

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